

## GOD'S NEW COVENANT

Two things have become popular with presidential candidates in the 20<sup>th</sup> century politics: (1) to coin an expression incorporating the word “New” and (2) to make an allusion in their campaign theme to the Bible. Franklin Delano Roosevelt had his “New Deal” and George Bush his “New World Order.” Theodore Roosevelt campaigned on the phrase borrowed from Scripture: “We stand at Armageddon, and we battle for the Lord.” Bill Clinton combined both tactics by promising the voter a “New Covenant.”

“New Covenant” is not only a Scriptural term, but is also the promise offered by the greatest governmental administration of all time, the foretold kingdom of Jesus Christ.

*“Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” (Jeremiah 31:31-34)*

Five features are evident from Jeremiah’s description of this covenant:

- (1) It includes both “the house of Israel.” and “the house of Judah.”
- (2) It differs from a former covenant made with Israel.
- (3) It becomes effective only “after those days,” indicating a fulfillment in the distant future.
- (4) It results in true heart conversion.
- (5) Its success will be universal.

Following is an individual examination of these five features of Jeremiah 31:31-34.

### HOUSE OF ISRAEL & HOUSE OF JUDAH

For nearly 400 years before Jeremiah’s writing, the kingdom of Israel had been divided into two separate and often competing countries. Israel was the title of the ten tribes, located largely in the north of the land. They were almost constantly idolatrous. Judah was the two-tribe kingdom in the south, with a history wavering between good and bad kings.

After four centuries of hostility, God promised to make a “new covenant” with the combined houses of Israel and Judah. A contemporary prophet, Ezekiel, graphically

illustrated this reunion of the two kingdoms by holding two sticks in his hand and blending them into one stick. (Ezekiel 37:15-28)

In verse, 19, Ezekiel's prophecy is interpreted:

*“Say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel his fellows, and will put them with him, even with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they shall be one in mine hand.”*

Then in the next several verses he adds details which give clues regarding the time of the fulfillment of this prophecy.

*“And say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land: And I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all: Neither shall they defile themselves any more with the idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions: but I will save them out of all their dwelling places, wherein they have sinned, and will cleanse them: so shall they be my people, and I will be their God. And David my servant shall be king over them; and they all shall have one shepherd: they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them. And they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob my servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt; and they shall dwell therein, even they, and their children, and their children's children for ever: and my servant David shall be their prince for ever. (Ezekiel 37:21-25)*

There are at least five clues in this passage revealing the time referred to:

- 1. Israel will be re-gathered **from among the heathen**. While this might partially apply to Judah at the time of Jesus' first advent, reference to the house of Israel, the ten-tribe kingdom, would not be accurate.
- 2. Israel will be **one nation** in “the land upon the mountains of Israel.” The return from the Babylonian captivity was predominantly for the two—tribe kingdom and the condition of Palestine in Jesus' day could not fully be styled “one nation.”
- 3. Israel will no longer defile themselves **“with any transgressions.”** While the Babylonian captivity seems to have successfully purged the nation of idolatry, the New Testament account finds them in abundant transgression. (Matthew 23)
- 4. David will be their king. It is debatable whether the resurrected literal king David is referred to, or, more likely, the Son of David, the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

In either case, it points to a time when Israel and Judah united will be in charge of their own governmental affairs. This condition did not exist in New Testament times.

- 5. They will dwell in their promised land **“forever.”** They will not be plucked up and scattered among the nations, as they were after the Bar Kochba rebellion in A.D. 135.

These accumulated signs point to a future time in history. That it will be a time in the near future is evidenced by the re-gathering of Israel in their ancient homeland as we now observe.

*“Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them: and I will place them, and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore. My tabernacle also shall be with them: yea, I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And the heathen shall know that I the LORD do sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary shall be in the midst of them for evermore.” (Ezekiel 37:26-28)*

Again three concomitants parallel the time when the two sticks will be fully joined.

- 1. At this time God will make “a covenant of peace” with the united kingdom. This “covenant of peace” is elsewhere styled “the new covenant.”
- 2. His “tabernacle” will be with them and he will be “their God.” This prophecy is quoted in Revelation 21:2 at the time when “the New Jerusalem” comes down from God out of heaven, as a bride adorned for her husband—when the church of Christ, as his bride, will be fully united with him.
- 3. Even the heathen will know that Jehovah is God, and they he will “sanctify Israel.” In another prophecy by the same prophet, Ezekiel tell of god’s final deliverance of his people. (Ezekiel 38, 39) On four occasions in that prophecy he emphasized the time when he will be “known” by the heathen, and when he will “sanctify” Israel. (Ezekiel 38:16; 39:7, 23, 28)

### **A DIFFERENT COVENANT**

By contrasting Israel’s new covenant with a former covenant made at Sinai—the Law Covenant—Jeremiah hints at why this covenant is called “new.” It will replace the old law covenant, even though based on the same code of moral commandments. As the old covenant was based on works, so the same would be true of the new covenant. “If ye keep these things, ye shall live in them.” (Leviticus 18:5)

“AFTER THOSE DAYS”

The term in Jeremiah 31:33, “after those days,” seems to be an obvious allusion to Jeremiah 31:27, 28.

*“Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man, and with the seed of beast. And it shall come to pass, that like as I have watched over them, to pluck up, and to break down, and to throw down, and to destroy, and to afflict; so will I watch over them, to build, and to plant, saith the LORD.”*

This sowing with abundance—“with the seed of man and with the seed of beast”—will be after God has watched over them “to pluck up, and to break down, and to throw down, and to destroy, and to afflict.” This is an excellent description of Israel’s Diaspora, which has only recently begun to come to an end with the re-gathering of that people to their ancient homeland.

This act of plucking up and destroying is sharply reminiscent of an experience of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, recorded in Daniel, chapter 4. It tells of how the king’s heart was turned beastlike, and he roamed among the wild animals for a period of seven years. Afterwards his kingdom was guaranteed to him. He then regained his sanity and continued his reign.

Most Bible scholars concur that this is prophetic of Israel’s fallen kingdom. That dominion collapsed with the dethronement of their last king, Zedekiah. (See Ezekiel 21:27) Some scholars assert that this event occurred in the year 606 B.C. A period of seven prophetic years (360 years each) would come to an end in 1914 A.D., a date very significant in the modern return of Israel to their land.

#### A TRUE CONVERSION

The next feature Jeremiah emphasizes is that the new covenant will not be an external façade. The success of this covenant will be the changing of men’s hearts. The “hearts of stone” will be replaced with “hearts of flesh.”

No code of judicial conduct can elicit willing obedience unless its subjects want to obey its precepts. The old and trite saying that “a man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still,” is as true in moral matters as it is in intellectual disputes.

The secret of the success of God’s plan is in the grand experiment which can be rightly dubbed “the permission of evil.’ By permitting man in this lifetime to make his own decisions based on self-interest and experience the consequences of sin--misery and death--and then contrasting that with the resurrection experience in God’s kingdom--health, happiness and life--there is little doubt as to which man will choose. This choice will not only change his actions, but also change his heart. Man will receive a “new heart”—a “heart of flesh.”

#### UNIVERSAL SUCCESS

Jeremiah predicts this New Covenant to be so successful that “no one will need to say to his neighbor, ‘Know ye the Lord,’ for they will all know me from the least even to the greatest.”

“**No one**”—not only none of the natural children of Abraham, but “**no one.**” The promises of this covenant are for **all**, the Gentile as well as the Jew.

*“And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.” –Isaiah 2:3*

*“In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold **out of all languages of the nations**, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you.” — Zechariah 8:23*

Yes, God’s promises—this kingdom and this new covenant—are for ALL people, not merely the Jewish people.

This kingdom of Christ under the New Covenant is elsewhere in Scripture referred to as a thousand year period. (Revelation 20:1-6) At the conclusion of this period, the Revelator describes a final test of mankind with Satan, the great tempter, loosed and permitted to use his evil influence. Those who follow him at this time will be cut off in “the second death”—complete annihilation. Those who choose to obey righteousness will have the privilege of living forever in a perfected earth. Only the willfully disobedient will be destroyed.

With such a future, whose “new covenant” can compare with God’s! Can the “New Covenant” of modern politicians promise **freedom from disease, want, war and death**? Assuredly not! But God’s New Covenant promises these exact things:

- **Freedom from disease**
- **Freedom from want**
- **Freedom from war**
- **Freedom from death**

“And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.”—Revelation 21:4

**GOD’S KINGDOM IS THE ANSWER!**